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## FRENCH HAY; OR, LOST AND FOUND.

A TALE OF ENGLISH VILLAGE LIFE.

BY MRS. BURBURY, AUTHOR OF "FLORENCE SACKVILLE," "THE GRAMMAR SCHOOL BOYS," ETC. ETC.

## CHAPTER III.

STANDING beside the neat little table in the broad sunlight which streamed through the open window of the parlour, was found Blanche, who, with an exclamation of pleasure, came forward to me, saying—

"Ah, Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Norman, this is too bad. You are in a plot with mamma and Sybil to hold up my housekeeping to derision, and worse even than Edgar Ravenswood, descend upon the barren land, without giving me poor Caleb's refuge of an excuse. Well, never mind—your punishment be upon your own head, for I have not even the 'auld chuckie' to fall back upon."

"May be, not," cried Sybil, entering with something carefully held in her tiny apron; "but if you have not the 'auld chuckie,' I have what is far better, the 'auld chuckie's' eggs. See what Jerry has found," she continued, spreading her apron wide, and exhibiting its contents. "our truant's nest, in which she has just deposited this lovely white ball in honour of her old mistress. Behold, Mrs. Norman, what a tribute Brownie has paid to you. Now for my *début* in cooking; by-the-by, I wonder whether that is to be one of the accomplishments in which I shall be expected to instruct my 'sweet little friends.' If it is, shades of Mrs. Rumford and Eliza Acton be my help, for I am almost as innocent as the poor old king who wondered how the apples got inside the dumplings. Ah, you may smile, Mrs. Norman, and be as unbelieving as you like; but only ask Blanche if I did not make the bread last week, and forgot the yeast."

"A libel, Mrs. Norman! a libel. You should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, Sybil. She was trying an experiment, testing the virtues of some wonderful leavening powder which old Judy recommended; a delicate compliment—"

"Which nearly cost me my batch of bread and reputation too. Well, never mind; I mean now to redeem my character signally by the preparation of this egg. Two minutes and a-half, or three minutes, Mrs. Norman? No, don't protest against giving me the trouble, for that would only involve the utterance of all sorts of commonplaces, which I think ladies who have been raised to the dignity of preceptresses should hold themselves above."

"Poor Sybil," said her mother when she had left the room, "she has chosen a hard portion. I fear those spirits are forced. She hopes to support mine, by feigning that her own are light."

"I think not," I answered. "I think she is really lighter of heart and happier now than she has been for some time. She feels that she is doing right, following the path of duty; and, to such a mind as hers, that reflection is sufficient to brighten any fate."

"I believe it, I do believe it," replied Mrs. Vivyan with emphasis; "but sad as our lot has been, it has fallen peculiarly hard on Sybil. How true it is that adversity is the real touchstone of character. Never, until sorrow came upon her, had I any idea of the firmness and courage latent in her disposition. Upon Blanche I always relied, for she was ever calm and brave; but Sybil has been so petted, so idolised, so sheltered from even childish ills, that my heart trembled for her when fortune first, and then he in whom she had garnered her whole heart, failed her; yet see how she has risen, not merely to meet the storm but to overcome it. Who could have imagined—"

"Stay, my dear madam, stay," I exclaimed hastily; "you are, I fear, proceeding in error, supposing that I have been honoured with more of your daughter's confidence than she has thought fit to bestow: Miss Sybil has never mentioned the past to me, nor any matter personal to herself."

"Indeed! then, indeed I thank you for checking me. I had fancied it impossible for so young a girl, and one, too, so complete a novice in the school of affliction, to avoid speaking to so kind a friend as yourself, of a grief of which I know her heart is full. But it seems that I know not all her self-conquest and control even yet,"

"No; nor do I think she herself is fully conscious of them. Within her mind lie the elements of a great and noble character, which adverse circumstances will develop, but of which at present she is ignorant."

"Then, oh! if the knowledge can only be obtained through suffering, may God grant her to remain in ignorance."

"Oh, surely not, dear madam," I cried earnestly; "all that is great and holy is purified by the keen fire of affliction, and surely no price is too large or hard to pay, for a closer likeness to HIM whose name we bear. Ah! if I had still a child, if it had pleased God to spare even one, my tenderest and best beloved, I would rather have chosen for her that sharp lot out of which, like silver from the refiner's furnace, pure things are fashioned, than that quiet, easy, velvet path which sluggards love, and in which great natures perish."

"Right, Mrs. Norman," exclaimed Sybil, who had entered unseen as I spoke, and now stood before us, her bright eyes kindling, and her figure dilating with the energy of her speech; "death in harness, death in the breach, rather ten million times, than that inglorious sloth in which the lives of one half God's people, born with souls to save or lose, are wasted shamefully. Oh, those glorious lines of Longfellow's! those earnest, *human* lines! how my heart bounds to them, like the Swiss to their battle-cry."

And with the mellowest, sweetest tones of a voice whose music I never heard equalled, she repeated the following verses from that exquisite little poem, the author of which, even if he had never written another line, would have been immortal.

Upon the lines I have italicised, her voice lingered fondly, as it indeed her ear loved and her heart echoed the words:—

*Life is real! Life is earnest,*

*And the grave is not its goal;*

*Dust thou art, to dust returnest,*

*Was not spoken of the soul.*

*Not enjoyment and not sorrow*

*Is our destined end or way;*

*But to act, that each to-morrow*

*Finds us further than to-day.*

*In the world's broad field of battle*

*In the bivouac of life,*

*Be not like dumb driven cattle;*

*Be a hero in the strife.*

*Trust no Future, how'er pleasant!*

*Let the dead Past bury its dead!*

*Act—act in the living Present,*

*Heart within, and God o'erhead!*

*Lives of great men all remind us*

*We can make our lives sublime,*

*And departing leave behind us*

*Footprints on the sands of time;*

*Footprints that perhaps another*

*Sailing o'er life's solemn main,*

*Some forlorn and shipwrecked brother,*

*Seeing, shall take heart again*

*Let us then be up and doing,*

*With a heart for any fate;*

*Still achieving, still pursuing,*

*Learn to labour and to wait.\**

"Poetry! poetry! Oh, Sybil, what a faithless assistant you are," cried Blanche, returning with a dish of grapes from the vine which overshadowed the window. "Here is the pride of my cookery growing colder and colder, while you regale Mrs. Norman and mamma upon poetry. What promises did you not beguile me with, when I entrusted my coffee-pot to your mercy?"

"Did I? Ah, well, I will redeem them. But I am not all to blame; I only followed where Mrs. Norman led."

A gay dialogue now ensued, in the course of which I learnt for

the first time that little Mary had been dismissed, and that—to use the phrase she would herself have employed — “barrin sich help as her own tin fingers, God prosper ‘em! could give, mornins and nights, jist to do sich bits o’ jobs as the ladies, Heaven be their

powerful weapons against my opposition to her plan. It does grieve me so much to see dear mamma exerting herself, not only beyond her strength, but in matters so wholly unworthy of her, that I could not long resist any proposal which had her relief for its



SYBIL ABOUT TO ENTER ON NEW DUTIES.

bed! could not foul their hands wid,” they had no domestic assistant save old Judy.

“We could not afford it,” said Blanche frankly, “and that—see how weak and silly we blave ones are—was one of Sybil’s most

object. Now, however, Sybil will reap the first fruits of her self-sacrifice, in the pleasure of recalling poor little Mary, and thus restoring mamma to some portion of her former comfort. Dear, generous Sybil, if it were possible to envy her one particle of the

gratification and reward she is to purchase so dearly, it would be the delight she will now experience."

"But you will share it."

"Oh yes, yes, and largely. Do you know, Mrs. Norman, that Sybil and I often remind me of the legend which in Corsica is said to attach to twins—that nothing of joy or sorrow shall happen to one, without the other, at however great a distance, participating in it; only, instead of the pain being reflected, and therefore weaker, I think we each feel the other's grief more keenly than we should feel our own."

"Yes, next to the love of a mother for her children, there is no love on earth so strong and beautiful as that of sisterhood. It is the only relationship for which I ever pined."

"Indeed—I fancied—I thought I had heard you speak of a sister."

"No; I never was so happy as to have the life of one spared long enough to know her; although once, many many years ago, when I was a girl, I had a friend whom I loved almost, if not quite, as well as you love Sybil, but from whom the chances of life separated me in early youth."

"But if she lives, even although apart, you may still derive as much happiness from corresponding with each other, and interchanging thoughts and feelings, as sisters can, whom the fate of marriage separates."

"Yes, under ordinary circumstances I might; as it is, that consolation is denied me. After the second year of our parting I lost sight of her, and whether she is yet alive I know not."

"That is indeed sad, especially as, loving her as you describe, you have, of course, exerted every effort to find her?"

"Yes, but there were many impediments in the way of my success. I was very young, without a mother to take an interest in, or promote my wishes, without money to prosecute inquiries myself, with an aged father whose cares and affections were almost wholly monopolised by his parish, and who thought, I dare say, that the absence of my gay and merry friend was a great addition to the peace and quiet of the old Parsonage. Communication with India, too, was not so frequent then as now; and having no friends or even acquaintances there, it was not so easy to trace a girl whose married name I did not even know."

"Could not her relatives here have aided you?"

"She had none—she was an orphan."

"And you her only friend? Poor girl! her lot was hard. Is it not strange though, that she, in whose way were none of the obstacles which fettered you, and who knew so well where to find you, did not write?"

"It is; and therefore I am sure that she is dead. We shall meet no more, until we stand together before God."

"His will be done," replied Blanche reverently; "but you must not despair; even on earth there are often strange and glad meetings, all the more joyous because unexpected, and I have a faith that all trials well and truly borne for His sake who lays them on us, have a bright ending; and you have a right to look for one, since you have suffered much."

"I have indeed; some day, when we sit together and you can muster time and patience, you shall hear the story of my life. Now, however, we must leave the past for the present, since it is nearly twelve o'clock, and I promised to lend Sybil a few old books which she may require."

The words were scarcely spoken when she to whom they related, equipped for her expedition, entered through the garden-door. Her face was very pale, but in her eye was the bright resolute gleam which gave so peculiar an expression to her countenance, and seemed to say, that, come what struggle might, she would be ready.

"Thanks, thanks!" she said, as I handed her the old volumes of which I had spoken; "armed with these venerable authorities, I begin to feel myself rather more dignified and important. Good-bye, Blanche; don't look as if I were going to execution. Good-bye, Mrs. Norman; I'll come and tell you how I get on;" and without another word or glance, she hurried through the little passage, opened the front door and went out.

For a moment Blanche stood gazing up the road along which her sister had passed, then she turned, and saying quietly, "I will go to mamma," left me.

Oh, what a long, long morning that was, and how often I went to the window—not expecting, of course, to see Sybil return, but from sheer restlessness and inability to sit still. Try as I would, I could settle to nothing. I went into the garden—the peaches and grapes hung ripe and temptingly, but I scarcely heeded them; into the kitchen, but long before I had beaten the eggs for old Susan's pudding, I left it to look at the clock, and compare it with the church. I brought out my knitting, but dropped so many stitches, that at last, after making Jacob's ladders innumerable, I put it down in despair; then I turned to the bundle of linen I had promised to cut out for the clothing club, but after at least a dozen vain attempts to make baby's nightgowns into school-frocks, I relinquished that too. Then I pounced upon a duster and attacked my little bookcase, but after putting everything out of place, turning the volumes topsy-turvy, and getting as fidgetty as possible, I gave that up also, and finally marched up stairs, threw the front-room window open, and seating myself upon the chair beside it, tried to be quiet.

Fate was, however, against me; for just as I had settled myself and counted over for the twentieth time the number of things Sybil would have to do, and the exact time they ought to take her, the little gate of my garden swung back, and looking down I saw the figure of a gentleman come to the door. Without a moment's delay it was opened, not by Betty, but by the stranger, and before I could feel alarm or surprise, a fine manly voice cried,

"Hollo, hollo! Mrs. Norman, Mrs. Norman."

Then came a whistle, a clear mellow whistle—I knew it in a moment, and hurrying fast down stairs, crying out, "I'm here, I'm coming," was seized upon at the bottom, and kissed over and over again, so vehemently, that my breath seemed in danger of being stopped.

"My dear boy, my dear Master Guy!" I cried, when I could speak, and in tones almost as excited as his own. "So it is you—how you are grown! but not a bit altered, not a bit changed. How glad I am!"

"So am I, and how well you are looking! better than ever, I do believe. There must be something wonderfully rejuvenising in this French Hay air; you seem scarcely ten years older than when you taught me A, B, C, while my poor dear mother looks so haggard and worn, that it makes my heart ache to see her."

"Does she?—is she no better?" I asked sorrowfully—*happier* I would have said, but that I durst not.

"No," answered he, "nor ever will be on this side heaven. Oh, Norry (the pet name he used to give me in his infancy before he could speak plain, and which he had learnt from his mother), what evil hap married her to such a fate?—what madness could possess her—you—everybody?"

"I do not know. I do not know. We did it for the best—her heart was so set upon it. She loved him so much; and he seemed so worthy of it, that it would have taken harder natures than any who were about her then, to deny her."

"Poor mother! she has met denials enough since—it would have been well had they commenced earlier."

"So it seems; but we cannot tell. We are no better judges now than we were then; and your father's manner had a fascination in it, and an apparent devotion to her, which would have won him friends from the most prejudiced."

"Ah, that manner," cried the young man bitterly, "he has it now. Cold, polished tyrant as he is, to strangers he appears all blandness and grace, while to her—good heavens! when I think of all this same fair specious manner makes her suffer, I wish either that she were dead, safe in the heaven she merits, or that I were not her son, but free—free to revenge her wrongs, and give her rest;" and turning sharply round, he threw himself into a chair, covering his face with his hands.

"Is it still so bad, then?" I asked softly; for while my love for the sufferer overcame my sense of right, and I knew how blameable was my questioning a son of his father, I yet could not refrain. "Is it still so bad?"

"Worse and worse. No slave who ever toiled under a driver's whip, no hunted felon, no guilty wretch set upon by the whole charitable world, ever led a more wretched life than my mother does; and yet she is surrounded by wealth and luxury, with every-

thing about her to cheat the world into believing her happy, but without the power which the meanest servant in the house possesses to use or claim a single fraction. Whatever she loves, is, first upon one excuse, then upon another, taken from her; and latterly, upon the pretence that her letters disturbed my mind in the discharge of my duties, she has been forbidden to write to me."

"Impossible!"

"You may well say so, but it is true."

"How does she bear it?"

"Patiently, as an angel would endure the tyranny of sin; hopelessly, as a flower would bear the loss of light and air. She was dying."

"Oh, good heavens! Oh, Master Guy!"

"Why, what else could be expected? For what else was this treatment adopted?"

"Oh, good great heavens! can there be such infamy—and you?"

"Went to her the moment I suspected the cause of her silence; faced my father in his murderous cruelty, and so far as I was concerned, rescued her from it. She is free to write to me now."

"But how did you accomplish it?"

"I cannot tell you—by concessions I hate to think of. However, they are nothing, so she is comforted. But to think that any man not absolutely a fiend, should debar a mother, and such a one as mine, of the privilege of corresponding with her child, the youngest, the only one left to her alive out of a whole family, and that too for no reason but the love of torture, is beyond belief."

"It is, indeed; how is she now?"

"Better, much better. Pale, and worn, and sorrowful, of course, but better in heart and spirits. She gave me a letter to you, which is among my traps at the Hall. I could not stay to rummage them, but like a child came off, you see, the instant I arrived. And now tell me about yourself. How have you been? how are Betty and Jerry, and have they made up a match of it yet? and our old protégée, Peggy Morton? and how do the French Hay people get on?—and—"

"Patience, patience! you are as great a rattle as ever, I'm afraid. How do you think I am to answer all this host of questions at once? Betty and Jerry are quite well, and, although in the same state of single-blessedness as when you left them, will be in ecstasies at the sight of you; poor Peggy is dead, and her grandson, the lad who used to carry your fishing-tackle, gone to sea."

"So far, so good; and now for the neighbours. How are the grandees? I haven't heard of the locomotion of the Pyramids, but has the next most wonderful thing in the world happened? Have the French Hay people become civilised?"

"Not a bit. I think they are worse."

"Well, that's pleasant, certainly."

"Very; only fortunately it doesn't matter."

"Not a rap; if they like to be uncomfortable and ridiculous, why shouldn't they. You and I don't envy the privilege, or covet an extension of the indulgence."

"No, but does that mean that you are coming among us?" I said eagerly.

"Only for a day or two—my leave has nearly expired."

"Cannot you get it extended? It is so long since I saw you, and it is absolutely cruel to come only to run away."

"Oh, you thankless individual; here have I come a hundred miles out of my way to indulge you with a peep at my blooming physiognomy, and yet you're not satisfied."

"Blooming! Why, you're as pale as a ghost."

"All the result of inhospitality. Why don't you ask me to dinner?"

"But would you stay?"

"Wouldn't I? I do not intend to go to a single place, except this and the Hall, while I am down; so, if you don't take compassion on me now and then, and give me a feed, my blooming countenance is likely to wax even paler than it is. Now don't make the least bit of a fuss, Norry, but treat me just as you used when I was a boy, and ran in from fishing to eat up all the cakes and tarts, and bread and butter that I could lay my wicked little hands on; while Betty, who had not the heart to stop me, used to stand by and watch the operation, crying out, 'Bless his dear little heart! what an appetite he has, surely!' And, by-the-by, that

reminds me that that identical cheffionier is the place where the almond-cakes were kept. I wonder if there are any there now; and the famous red-currant wine—is the receipt still in existence?"

"Try," I said, as I placed the well-remembered decanter and old china dish before him, and with feelings half sorrow, half joy, perused the bright, manly countenance I had known so well in boyhood, the only living offspring of my last and dearest pupil, whom I had dressed for her bridal, and over whose sad lot I had mourned so long and bitterly.

Sweet Eleanor Clive! as I sat gazing upon her son, how vividly her image returned to me! how clearly before my memory rose the vision of that day, when, a bereaved and desolate widow, I, with my helpless children, sat in this very room, weeping bitterly,—while she whom I had so recently aided to attire for her marriage, left all the gay and noble company who were assembled to greet her, and gliding in like a spirit from heaven, threw her arms round my neck, and prayed me to take comfort, promising—dear, deceived, and injured darling!—that, while she lived, my children should never need a friend!

Now where were all the group?

Dead or broken-hearted; while I, to all earthly foresight then, the most wretched and hopeless of the party, was the only one now left alive, and at peace.

It was a solemn thought; and as I dwelt upon it, my visitor and all things present grew dim and indistinct; little by little the space seemed peopled with shadows; and voices, long since hushed in the grave, whispered old words of endearment and love. The dead and absent had come back, and gathering round me, I was once more a mother and a friend.

It was a short trance and a happy one—a bright dream quickly over.

The world and its realities speedily claimed their due, and I was suddenly and thoroughly aroused by Guy Forrester's voice, exclaiming—

"Your hand has not lost its cunning, Norry, nor your cakes their flavour. Betty will guess who has been your visitor when she sees the havoc he has made—but saints and angels! what a beautiful face!" he cried, springing from his chair, "who is she? do you know her?"

"Who? what?" I asked, startled by his vehemence.

"This—this. By Jove, she's coming here."

I looked up, and then lifting the latch of the little wicket-gate, saw Sybil. In a moment all the anxieties which the joy of the recent meeting had for a time obscured, rushed on my mind, and, full of self-reproach for my involuntary forgetfulness, I murmured some indistinct apology and hurried out to meet her.

She was coming up the path with a hasty step, and smiled faintly as I met her.

"I must not stay," she said, pressing the hand I extended. "Mamma will be so anxious; only I thought that, by coming in this way and going through the paddock, I should lose no time, and could tell you how I have sped."

"Thank you—thank you; and how has it been?" I said, walking on fast, to keep pace with her.

"Tolerably well."

"But on the whole?"

"I don't know—I can't tell yet—better and worse than I anticipated."

"Worse?"

"Yes; Mrs. Warrenne has broken our compact; she and a visitor were present almost the whole time I stayed."

"Abominable! when the contrary was so expressly stipulated."

"Yes; and besides that it is such a wanton breach of faith, it fetters me sadly with the children; and does them an immensity of harm. They are nice little creatures, and would, I think, be very good and endearing; but their mother's constant interference destroys all subordination and respect."

"Of course; but did she offer no apology?"

"No."

"Was she courteous?" I asked timidly; for although I longed above all things to know this, I feared to ask it.

"Well, yes; tolerably at last—but it seemed put on, as if she were playing the amiable before her visitor."

"And the teaching, the business about which after all you went?"

"Oh, I managed admirably, although that is saying sadly little; for, poor children, they are so wretchedly ignorant, that I really think your Betty, or our little Mary, would be quite competent to meet all their requirements. They certainly can read and write, but in such a fashion, that it would have been infinitely better if the knowledge had been spared. But good bye—I must not delay any longer. See, there are mamma and Blanche in the garden looking for me. Good bye—I will come in again some time during the evening, if you will have me;" and without waiting for a reply, she hastened on.

Returned to the parlour, I found my guest in a state of considerable excitement. Like all his race, he was a passionate admirer of beauty, and Sybil's rare loveliness had struck him powerfully. As he had done once before that day, he poured question upon question upon me, until, perfectly bewildered by their multitude and diversity, I gave up all attempt at replying, as being a feat of hopeless accomplishment, and crossing my hands, sat down and waited patiently.

He laughed.

"How provoking you are, Norry; why don't you answer me?"

"Because I have but one mouth and one brain, neither of which has capacity for understanding and replying to more than one thing at a time."

"Oh, you tease. Well, one question at a time then. Who is that Eastern Hourri you have been spiriting away?"

"What Eastern Hourri?" I said demurely; "I have seen no infidel ghost here."

He shook his closed hand at me.

"Well then, that very nice-looking young lady you marched off with just now?"

"Ah, now you are intelligible. That young lady is my friend and neighbour, Miss Sybil Vyvian."

He pulled a face, one of the shocking boy's tricks which I do believe he will never leave off.

"Sybil! what a villainous name! her papa and mamma ought to be extinguished. Sybil Jenkins, or Tomkins, which?"

"Neither; Sybil Vyvian, and I warn you, I will not have a word said against the name—it's a grand name, and it suits her."

"Whew! Does she tell fortunes then? If so, she's a faithless prophetess, or she'd have foretold my visit to-day."

"How do you know that she didn't?"

"Because the slightest hint of such an honour would have excited Betty to the instant sacrifice of the fatted calf, even if you had remained insensible to the duty, and I should not have been reduced to demolish a plate of gingerbread in despair. But you've only answered one of my questions. Where does she live?"

"At the White Cottage."

"A resident?"

"Yes."

"With whom? Cassandra? Now don't be affronted, Norry; it is such a desperate name—so thoroughly absurd and French Hayish, that I can't help laughing at it."

"I see nothing absurd about it, and the Vyvians do not belong to French Hay."

"Phocians, perhaps? that alters the case. But seriously, who is she?"

"Miss Sybil Vyvian."

"You told me that before."

"Then why do you ask the same question again? I can tell you no more."

"Yes, you can. I want to know who her parents are, and why, if she doesn't belong to this amiable place, she lives in it."

"Her father was a lawyer; and her mother, sister, and herself came here to live economically."

"Did you know them before?"

"No."

"Are they—?"

"Now, Master Guy, you have been well brought up; and you have been long enough out of French Hay to know better than to ask impertinent questions."

"So I have, Norry, so I have. I stand corrected; but as one doesn't see anything so exquisite as your friend with the heathenish

name, above once or twice in one's life, it is but natural to desire to know something of such a rarity. Answer me this one question, and then I'll try to be contented. Is her sister like her—is she as beautiful?"

"In a different way, yes. Once I thought her the most beautiful."

"And their mother?"

"Just what the mother of such girls should be."

"What a trio! enough to turn a man's brain. But of course you don't expect me to take all this upon trust; you intend to shelter me under your wing, give me a good character, and introduce me."

"Impossible! I could not take such a liberty. They never visit."

"Oh yes they do. They visit you."

"But a gentleman—strangers."

"I'm only a boy, and you were a stranger once," he answered coolly. "It's of no use making excuses, Norry, for see these Peris, or Houris, or Sybils, I will. If you won't introduce me in a respectable way, I shall be under the necessity either of falling down in a fainting-fit at their door, and compelling them to take me in, or mistaking the White Cottage for the Parsonage, and taking them in, by some plausible story which I shall invent as I go on, and then call upon you to corroborate."

"But if you are going in a day or two—"

"There won't be time to do any great mischief, either in the way of losing my own heart, or running off with theirs."

"But really now, Master Guy," I said earnestly; for besides that I shrank from appearing to presume upon Mrs. Vyvian by introducing a stranger without her permission, I really dreaded the consequences of throwing so young and evidently susceptible a man into the society of two such girls as Blanche and Sybil; "you must consider."

"Oh, I have, all the time we've been talking. I have thought it well over, and made up my mind deliberately. I never do things in a hurry."

"Well, then," I said, reduced to an extremity, "you must take the responsibility on yourself; I cannot."

Rap, tap, tap, upon the door.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"Come in," I answered impatiently, thinking of course that it was Betty with some domestic trouble, and therefore never turning my head, until I saw Guy spring from his chair, when rising also, I perceived, to my inexpressible dismay, Blanche Vyvian standing in the doorway.

She blushed slightly upon seeing a stranger, but was far less embarrassed than myself, who felt as if, in sending her there, that Fate had done her worst; and advancing gracefully, said—

"You must forgive me for intruding, dear Mrs. Norman; but I did not know that you were engaged. I come with a message from mamma. Sybil has a violent headache, and mamma thinks that if you would kindly reverse the terms of the engagement she made with you just now, and come to us this evening instead of Sybil coming to you, that it would spare her an exertion she does not appear very well able to encounter."

How dreadfully provoked I felt, the more so as I saw from the demure mischief in Guy's downcast glance, that whatever I said or did, he would twist to the advancement of his own will, while Blanche, puzzled by my silence, to which of course she had not the faintest clue, would think me rude or capricious.

At last I managed to stammer out something about an unexpected engagement, which was instantly cut short by Guy, exclaiming,

"Oh, pray do not let me be an obstacle to Miss Vyvian's wishes. Betty will take care of me."

Blanche looked from one to the other of us, with a glance full of wonderment, evidently perplexed to know who this cool young gentleman, whom she had never seen, or even heard of before, could be.

Guy saw and interpreted the look, and gave me a quiet smile of triumph, which said, as plainly as any words could have done,

"You'll be obliged to introduce me; so do it with a good grace at once."

How angry I was, but it was useless to show it; and so, making the best of the dilemma, I said,

"Miss Vyvian, will you permit me to introduce Mr. Forrester to you."

A bright gleam of pleasure lighted up Blanche's features as she exclaimed,

hours, and quite half the time she has been wishing me at the antipodes—not secretly and quietly, but evidently."

"Indeed! I fear that she is far more likely to wish me there, for my unwelcome intrusion,"



SYDIE'S FIRST MORNING AT MRS. WARREN'S.

"Mr. Forrester! the son of your 'dear young lady,' as you call her, Mrs. Norman? I do, indeed, congratulate you."

"Thank you, Miss Vyvian; that is more than Mrs. Norman does for herself, I assure you. I have scarcely been in the house two

Guy replied with a compliment so delicately framed that it was impossible to be displeased. Blanche answered—and in an inconceivably short time they were talking away with the most perfect ease and frankness,

it was the first time I had seen Blanche in any society except that of home, and although I believe that I had always fully appreciated the sweetness of her manners then, yet I confess I was scarcely prepared for the high-bred grace, and gentle feminine dignity, which, combined with the complete self-possession of one used to the best society, distinguished her now.

In a room, unless when Sybil was strongly excited, Blanche was certainly more generally attractive than her sister; she was more placid, more English; less impulsive, and consequently less subject to external impressions; and while Sybil's knight, had she lived in the days of chivalry, might fearlessly have challenged all Southern Europe to produce his mistress's equal in beauty, Blanche might fitly have sat for the representative of all which English hearts hold dear.

And this girl, so lovely, so good, and so endearing, surrounded by circumstances which to every true and generous heart only added the warmth and bond of sympathy to her other attractions, was now thrown into the society of one, who, if he inherited his sweet mother's admiration of the beautiful and the good, would be only too susceptible of her claims, and too apt to recognise them at the expense of prudence, obedience and duty. For there could be no doubt in the mind of any who knew General Forrester, that, if all the charms and virtues which have adorned the sex from Eve downward until now could have been concentrated in one individual, they would not have compensated to him for the want of rank and wealth.

If Guy, therefore, choosing beauty and goodness, instead of riches and title, should give his heart to such a girl as she upon whom he now sat gazing so intently, it needed no prophet to foretell the end.

How long I sat musing upon the possibility of this new trouble arising, I do not know, for lately I have become sadly addicted to reveries; but at length I was aroused by Blanche's voice saying,

"Good bye, Mrs. Norman; when mamma and Sybil learn who is your guest, they will, I am sure, hold you exonerated from your engagement to us."

"No, no. I will not hear of it. I will not consent to be in the way. I have hosts of things to do, which I can accomplish very well this evening, and leave Mrs. Norman free from all hospitable cares on my account."

Poor Blanche! here was a dilemma! To one or other of us, or somebody, she must be rude. The right thing, and that which her own impulse suggested, was of course to extend the invitation to Guy, and so put an end to all difficulties at once; and had he been older, uglier, less attractive, she would have obeyed it at once; but a kind of instinct forbade the words, and she hesitated painfully.

Guy saw the perplexity, and, like every man of the world, understood it; but instead of trying to lessen it by suggesting some arrangement which would relieve us of his presence, without involving Blanche or myself in a charge of inhospitality, he remained provokingly silent.

At length, nothing settled, Blanche rose to go, and with hat in hand Guy was instantly at the door, evidently determined to escort her.

This cool determination irritated, while it amused me, and I exclaimed—

"Do not disturb yourself, Master Guy; I will walk with Miss Vyvian through the garden."

I might as well have talked to the table.

A faint smile and a deep blush appeared upon Blanche's countenance as she passed through the door so courteously held open, and turning to me, she said—

"Will you show me your new Dahlia, to-day?"

But if Blanche expected by this hint to deter her persevering cavalier from attendance, it only displayed her ignorance of mankind in general, and the Forresters in particular.

Guy stood as if he were deaf and dumb, hearing and saying nothing.

After another half minute's delay we went into the garden. I led the way to the new Dahlia; but as Blanche and I had watched it very carefully ever since the first bud began to burst, even until now, there was nothing particularly attractive or novel in the sight to either of us.

That Guy saw thoroughly through the attempt to shake him off, and was resolved to baffle it, I knew by the peculiar quiver which every now and then contracted his lip, betraying his strong inclination to smile; and that the power to carry his point was in his own hands, I saw also.

Now, as there are few things I dislike so much as being conquered, I always make a point of yielding as soon as I am convinced of the hopelessness of my case, or the impossibility of carrying on the contest successfully. In some instances I yield, to fight again under better auspices and with more powerful weapons; in others, I give up at once and for ever; always, however, in both cases, doing so early enough to save my credit and spare myself the mortification of a defeat.

No sooner, therefore, was I convinced from Guy's manner that he was resolved to obtain an introduction to Mrs. Vyvian, than I decided to let matters go their own way, and without facilitating, refrain from offering the least *open* opposition to his plan.

Making no further delay or hesitation, therefore, I opened the gate into the paddock, relinquished the latch to Guy as a matter of course, and walked on with Blanche. In a few steps he was beside us, talking of old days, poor Nanny whom he remembered perfectly, and all well-beloved and unforgotten people, and things, of whom few still left on earth could now talk to me as intimately as himself.

Every tree, every gap seemed to have lived in his memory, and it was truly remarkable how he, whose habits and occupations had taken him into so many and so widely different scenes, should be able to recall so perfectly, places and things not seen for years. At first, I dare say the conversation was begun in the hope of propitiating me, and from no real care for the subject; but as it went on, and talking of them, seemed to bring departed friends and silent voices back again, Guy grew really and truly interested, and re-assuming his own warm-hearted, affectionate manner, became an infinitely more delightful and dangerous companion than before. Something, too, there was in the reminiscences which awoke in the young man's mind, the feelings, as well as the memories of other days, the almost filial regard he then entertained for me, and smitten, I suppose, with a sudden contrition for his present perversity, he stopped when we reached the gap in Mrs. Vyvian's hedge, and raising his hat gracefully to Blanche, bade her good bye, and suffered her to pass through, without making any attempt to follow.

I was puzzled at first, taking this for some new form of obstinacy; but the next glimpse of his truthful eyes explained all, and with a deep joy at finding the darling child I had loved so well, still as genuine and honest-hearted as in boyhood, I walked on silently.

He had his reward.

With the pudding-plates came in a tiny note from Mrs. Vyvian. I read it, and then handed it to Guy. There was the least possible shadow of triumph in his smile, as, after perusing it, he said, "Of course, she could not do otherwise," and then returned to the discussion of his apricots.

It was a little note, and contained but few words, though in them was the seed of great events.

The contents were simply these:

"My dear Mrs. Norman,

"Sybil has so bad a headache that I fear she would not be able to go to you this evening, or prove an agreeable companion if she did. As, however, she has set her heart upon seeing you, and talking over the occurrences of the morning, will you kindly indulge her by coming to us, and giving us the pleasure of your company to tea? It is very selfish to ask this, when Blanche tells me that you have a guest in the person of a dear old friend's son; but if he will accompany you, and find excuses for a dull evening in the sincere welcome which any friend of yours is certain to receive from us, we shall be delighted to see him.—Ever yours, B. VYVIAN."

In the old White Cottage garden there was a charming summer-house, covered with all the sweet-scented creepers, which compensate to English people for the rich almond-groves and gorgeous perfumes of sunnier lands; and here, leaning back in one of the great old-fashioned rustic chairs, her eyes fixed almost mournfully upon the glowing evening sky, I found Sybil.

I had hoped to find her with her mother and sister; but on inquiry I was told that she was alone in the summer-house, much

better, and had begged that when I came, I might be asked to go to her.

Vexed as I was at the fate which seemed determined to thwart me, and throw Blanche and Guy together, there was no alternative; so, leaving him to hold the basket into which Mrs. Vyvian and her eldest daughter were gathering grapes, I went in search of Sybil.

She had evidently been suffering much, for her eyes were heavy and the lids swollen and dark; but the acuteness of the attack had passed, and little save the dull aching heaviness and lassitude which succeeds extreme pain was left.

For some time after the first greetings and inquiries were exchanged, we remained silent. The day had been full of events to both of us, and the talkativeness which is born of vacuum was absent.

At length, rousing herself from her abstraction, Sybil said thoughtfully, her eyes still riveted on the purple sky—

"What creatures of circumstances we are, and how we veer with every wind! The faith which to-day, under one aspect of things, we would almost peril our lives to maintain, is in a week, under the influence of other feelings, a matter of speculation, if not of absolute contempt. Six months ago, my own existence was not a clearer fact to me, than was my belief in the truth of Madame Maintenon's assertion, that 'will is power.'"

"And have you lost your belief?"

"Almost, if not entirely."

"There you are wrong. Whenever will is *not* power, it is where it has been bent upon the achievement of impossibilities, upon ends which no rational being, possessed of God's greatest gift, common sense, would propose to himself; and then the failure has been in proportion to the absurdity of the aim. But where thorough self-knowledge, which in all cases should precede the assertion of an independent will, and which alone gives the right to use it—prompts to any enterprise or line of conduct, then will *is* power, and he only fails of success who is wavering or unsteady in his pursuit."

"You speak encouragingly."

"I speak as I think and know. The world and all creation is full of encouragement. We have great trials, great sorrows, great obstacles to bear and overcome, but never since man's first difficulty was presented and conquered, has God laid upon His creatures a lot which it was impossible for them to bear, or placed them in circumstances capable of improvement, and giving them the will, denied them the power to use it."

"Then how is it that so many clever, earnest-minded people fail in their undertakings?"

"I do not know that they do."

"Well, not clever people, perhaps, but certainly earnest-minded ones."

"Did you never see or hear of persons striving earnestly after an impossibility, or struggling with heart and soul to do or gain something, which you, the disinterested stander-by, saw was as much beyond their capabilities, and *therefore their power*, as if an ant should say, 'I will rebuild the Coliseum?'"

"Oh yes, often."

"Then your own experience is your answer. Nobody can say or think that the rebuilding of the Coliseum is an impossibility; but everybody must see that the emmet who should talk of, or set his heart upon doing it, must be an idiot. Will is only power when they who exert it apply it to ends which their self-knowledge tells them they can master. With all the will in the world, no ugly duckling could make itself a swan; but he, who, knowing and judging himself honestly, fixes upon an eminence which his capacities can reach, has only his own feebleness and infirmity of purpose to blame, if, to him, will is not power."

"I must take courage then, for surely I have not fixed upon an impossible eminence."

"No; and therefore you will succeed if you choose, and if you persevere."

"Ah! but the subjection of oneself, one's own passions and feelings, is a harder battle to fight and win, than anything wrested from the world; and in this it is, that, wishing with all my heart to conquer, I find that I have not the power."

"You are not well, and therefore desponding, to-night, or you would never say that while a human being has voice or heart to

*pray*, she has not the power to conquer herself. But precept is easier than practice, you will think; and that I, who talk so well, am far less self-controlled and well-disciplined than those whom I presume thus to lecture."

"Oh, no, no."

"You might justly and truly say so. I feel ashamed of my own conceit, and, as a fitting punishment, will change a subject which is one of my especial favourites. Now tell me, therefore, what has made you so melancholy to-day? I fear the morning's trial was a hard one."

"Yes; but what vexes me the most now is, that I allowed myself to be so vexed, and suffered so contemptible a person as my own sense tells me Mrs. Warrenne is, to distress me. My will to rise superior to her petty insolence is good, but my power—ah! Mrs. Norman, how true is Rochefoucault's maxim, that philosophy triumphs easily over past and future evils, but that present evils triumph over philosophy."

"Yes, most wise sayings seem true until they are matched with an opposite, and Le Duc was a shrewd, clever man. How is it though, by chance or design, that every time we approach the discussion of this morning's events, we wander away as if afraid of it?"

"I cannot tell. A natural repugnance to repeat annoyances, I suppose. But I don't think avoiding an unpleasant subject, which sooner or later *must* be entered upon, is wise; do you?"

"You have given me one saw; I'll give you another:

"Tender-handed, touch a nettle;  
It will sting you for your pains:  
Seize it like a man of mettle,  
And harmless it remains."

"Which is equivalent, I imagine, to saying that vexations vanish in the telling. I will try the experiment, although I am not very sanguine as to its success. And now, to begin at the beginning."

"It was rather earlier than the time appointed when I reached the Yew Tree, and therefore, I suppose, found everything in the most outrageous confusion; children, dogs, nursemaids, and a parrot, all screaming and romping together. Not a chair or table was free from litter, not one of all the party in a presentable shape. Something shocked, I suppose, by the aspect of matters and the opinion which a stranger would be likely to form of the establishment, the servant who opened the hall-door went before me, crying, 'Hush, hush!' But the trickling of a rivulet would stand as fair a chance of being heard amid the roar of Niagara, as that girl's voice did of piercing the clamour against which she protested; and it was not until she administered 'a good shaking,' as she called it, to the most riotous of my pupils, that her presence and mine was detected. Provoked as I was, I could not help laughing at the instant dismay and silence which succeeded the discovery, nor the looks, half-terror, half-defiance, which the children directed to me, while the nurses, pushing, quarrelling, and bustling, speedily commenced clearing away and putting things a little in order."

"My involuntary laugh re-assured the children, who, finding that I was not going to scold, soon began to laugh too, and approach nearer and nearer, until, both talking at once, I learned that Susan's sisters had come to see her, that she had brought them in to have a good game, that mamma was out, but would be so angry if she knew, and that the big white dog was Georgy's, and the parrot Addy's; all which information I received patiently, and as far as I could, gratefully."

"Presently, however, and before order could be restored, a tremendous peal at the great door-bell startled us all, and then came one general cry of, 'It's mamma, it's missis.'"

"Perhaps, as you know something of Mrs. Warrenne, and the style of her household, you may imagine the increased uproar and outcry which this announcement caused. As for me, I stood utterly bewildered and deafened, and my discomfort was not removed when the door was thrown widely open, and the lady herself, followed by a visitor, sailed in."

"Whether she had been annoyed by anything before, or whether my sudden introduction into such a scene of riot mortified her, of course I cannot guess; but with so little notice of me as almost amounted to none at all, she commenced scolding the servants vehemently, giving first one and then another warning to leave, in wholesale fashion, upbraiding the children for being the very worst and

most unmanageable creatures in the world, and pitying herself for the constant wear and tear of spirits she was condemned to undergo ; concluding by turning angrily to me, and saying, that, having desired me to be in attendance at half-past eleven o'clock, she would thank me to keep my time for the future, as she could not suffer her domestic arrangements to be thrown into disorder at the caprice of any one.

"My parlour-maid tells me that you have been in the house a quarter of an hour already, Miss Vyvian; an unpunctuality which I must request you to understand I cannot allow to be repeated. I can make some allowances for your natural anxiety to be here, but it is due to myself not to permit my indulgence to extend beyond a certain point ; therefore it is better you should clearly comprehend that from henceforth your services will not be required—unless especially desired by myself—either after or before the hours I engaged you for."

"Oh, how these words sent the blood to my cheeks, and the passion to my lips. I felt reddening all over. A moment more, one other word, and I should have thrown up my engagement—*my place*—for ever ; but the visitor, seeing, I suppose, that her sweet hostess was going rather too far, and moreover being probably touched with some kind of shame for her, interposed with a remark which drew off Mrs. Warrenne's attention, and gave me time to think. Meanwhile the servants, taking advantage of the diversion in their favour, left the room, and the children, looking as rough as Shetland ponies, and as puzzled between the contending authorities as possible, stood by."

"They were evidently pondering upon the scene which had just passed, and settling in their own minds the position I was to take ; debating how far it would be safe to defy my authority, and whether, judging from my countenance, it would be worth while to obey me, and take the chance of my turning out not quite so capricious as Susan, or so indifferent as mamma."

"How the question would have been decided, I cannot tell ; for, partly restored to good humour by the conversation of her friend, Mrs. Warrenne went out of the room, saying to me :—

"You may get the children's books out, and by the time you have arranged them I shall return ; I wish Mrs. Howard to give me her opinion of your teaching."

"Now this was going beyond even my endurance, newly strengthened as it had been, and the passionate and indignant reply it had cost me so much to control, was again bursting from my lips, when the door closed noisily, and my tormentor was gone."

"For a moment I stood trying with might and main to resist the violent inclination which prompted me to march out of the house at once and for ever, and the impulse would most certainly have conquered, but for one of those little accidents which seem to come so often, as if God-sent, between ourselves and ruin. Obstructing my way to the door was a heap of toys, and one with broken wires being entangled in my dress, I stooped to extricate myself, and while doing so, was alarmed by a shrill scream of pain."

"On looking up, I found that the cry proceeded from a pretty little girl who had come in through the open French window from the garden, and holding her hand towards us, was weeping bitterly. To throw the plaything down and run to the child, was of course my first impulse, when I discovered that the cause of her suffering arose from the sting of a wasp, which, buried in a plum, she had inadvertently seized and crushed in her hand. Without a moment's hesitation or delay, to inquire my patroness's pleasure, I despatched the frightened nurse for the necessary agents of relief, and taking the child in my arms, soothed and comforted her as well as I could, until the blue-bag and honey arrived. Very fortunately, both were quickly procured, and soon afforded ease, while I, intent upon the occupation, entirely forgot my irritation, and the impertinence which had so exasperated me."

"At last I was recalled to a remembrance of both, by the servant saying,

"Please to let me do Miss Lizzie's hand now, while you get ready for the lessons, or missis will come back before you have taken your things off, and then she'll be so cross."

"With a sort of impulse—I am sure it was not by the exertion of a deliberate will—I rose and took off my bonnet and mantle, and drawing a chair to the table, sat down, placing one of my pupils on each

side. I do not know how I felt ; I had always expected to find myself, upon my first essay, perfectly bewildered and at a loss what to do, and how to manage ; but now I forgot everything, except that I seemed in a maze, knowing and feeling nothing distinctly."

"I suppose I got on pretty well, for the children were very attentive, and I heard myself asking and answering questions, although, now, I know no more what they were about, than if they had been spoken in childhood, and fifty years had gone between. I was quite quiet and quite calm ; it seems to me that if an earthquake had opened the ground at my feet, and swallowed up the table from before me, I should not have felt any surprise or alarm ; the one surprise of finding myself there at all, extinguished every other. In this dreamy way things went on for a while, until Mrs. Warrenne and her friend came in."

"Then we all grew restless and uncomfortable, the trance began to pass away, and I became wretchedly conscious and alive to everything—the children's ignorance, my own discomfort, and their mamma's interference."

"Of all these, the last was the worst ; in her anxiety to show off and play the learned lady, she interfered with everything. Ask what I might, frame my questions how I would, she had always something to say ; and set me right so continually, that although at first I was sadly disposed to laugh, at last, seeing the bad impression it made upon the children, I became once more thoroughly provoked, while Mrs. Warrenne, fancying that she had silenced, and struck me dumb with admiration, grew quite facetious and condescending, encouraging me by expressing a patronising hope that after a time I should get on very well, and promising *before the children* to show me every indulgence and forbearance."

"Now only fancy, Mrs. Norman, if you can, any woman one degree removed from an absolute simpleton, speaking in this way to her children's instructress *before them*."

"Well, at last the lessons were over, and my mistress having talked herself into good humour, absolutely gave me permission to partake of the bread-and-cheese luncheon which was brought in for the children, and afterwards to walk round the garden with nurse, and see—she did not say *gather*—the fruit. I have an idea that she was about to add a caution against taking the peaches or grapes, for she certainly commenced some speech which had a marvellous tendency that way ; but I felt my eyes lighten as I rose from my chair, and without speaking tied on my bonnet ; and that, I suppose, deterred her from proceeding."

"With the fewest possible words and most distant farewell which indignation could frame, I took my leave, not trusting myself to notice her hospitality even by declining it ; although I do firmly believe, so strange is her social obliquity, that in asking me to lunch she fancied she was behaving in the most admirable and amiable manner possible, and displaying the greatest amount of generosity. But the annoyances of the morning were not over ; for while searching in the hall for my parasol, which had been removed from the stand upon which I had hung it, I encountered Mr. Warrenne, whose rude stare and officious assistance were even more intolerable than his wife's patronising inipertinences. To her, too, they seemed as objectionable as to me ; for when, following me with her friend, she passed through the hall and observed her husband's manner, she interposed with a haughty inquiry as to what I was waiting for, giving him at the same time the very unnecessary information that I was *only the new nursery governess*."

"To do the man justice, however, this intelligence, so perfectly conclusive in his lady-wife's opinion, of my want of title to any attention whatever, made no difference in his civility, rather increasing it than otherwise, as with a laugh he exclaimed—

"Oh, Georgy and Addy's governess ! Ah, well, there'll be something worth going for into the nursery then ; so, Mamselle, if I find you your lost property now, you must pay me the debt by giving me a lesson with the children to-morrow."

"Nonsense, my dear," replied Mrs. Warrenne loftily ; "you know that I allow no one to be present during the hours of study."

"Except yourself," interrupted the gentleman, with a disagreeable laugh.

"And if Miss Vyvian has lost anything, the proper person to apply to is the servant, whose duty it is to attend to the hall. Luncheon is waiting for us."